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ABSTRACT

The materials included in this document concern the theory, objectives, and administrative issues behind the project to describe the languages of the world. The basic objective of the project is to collect a series of language descriptions which achieve an acceptable level of descriptive adequacy without interfering with the freedom of the linguist to use any theoretical approach he wishes. The operation of the central program office is described along with the mechanics and guidelines for international coordination. The final report describes pilot projects to be implemented in selected geographical areas and language families. Such limited projects will provide the opportunity to test methods and tactics for handling the various linguistic, administrative, political, and practical problems involved in such programs. (VM)

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THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM TO DESCRIBE THE LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD

(MATERIALS PRESENTED AT THE BOLOGNA INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF LINGUISTS, 1972)

FL003 692

1. Paper presented at Plenary Session
2. List of discussants at Plenary Session
3. Final report to members of the Interim Committee
4. Minutes of the meeting of the Interim Committee
5. Background material

PRESENTED AT THE PLENARY SESSION, AUGUST 29, 1972

THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM TO DESCRIBE THE LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD

John Lotz

I would like to present a report on plans for an international program to describe the languages of the world. The program was launched two years ago at a symposium of linguists held at Burg Wartenstein in Austria, August 1 to 8, 1970, sponsored by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

The participants of this meeting - all noted for their scholarly achievements in linguistics - were invited to attend in their capacities as representatives of linguistic organizations from Australia, Japan, the Soviet Union, India, Africa, Western Europe, Latin America and the United States.*

FOOTNOTE (petit)

* The participants of the Burg Wartenstein symposium included:

GILBERT ANSRE, Director, Language Center, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, Ghana (Senior Research Fellow in Linguistics, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana).

CHARLES A. FERGUSON, President, Linguistic Society of America (1970); Co-Director, Language Universals Project, Stanford University; (Professor of Linguistics, Stanford University).

FOOTNOTE (petit)

SHIRÔ HATTORI, Co-Editor, Sakai gengo gaisetsu (An Introduction to the Languages of the World); Director, Tokyo Institute for Advanced Studies of Language; (Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, University of Tokyo).

EINAR HAUGEN, President, Comité International Permanent des Linguistes; (Professor of Scandinavian and Linguistics, Harvard University): On the Ecology of Languages.

VICTORIA JARCEVA, Director, Linguistic Institute and Corresponding Member Academy of Sciences of the USSR; (Professor of Linguistics, Moscow University).

JOHN LOTZ, Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C.; (Formerly Professor of Linguistics, Columbia University): The Role of Script in Describing the Languages of the world.

PRABODH B. PANDIT, Formerly Director of The Summer Schools of the Linguistic Society of India and Deccan College; (Professor of Linguistics, University of Delhi).

JEAN PERROT, Administrateur, Société Linguistique de Paris; Editor-in-Chief, 3rd Edition of Les Langues du Monde; (Professor of General Linguistics, Director, Institut de Phonétique et de Recherches sur le Langage, University of Paris).

FOOTNOTE (petit)

KENNETH L. PIKE, President, Summer Institute of Linguistics; (Professor of Linguistics, University of Michigan).

JORGE A. SUÁREZ, Member, Permanent Committee of American Indian and Creole Languages, Inter-American Program for Linguistics and Language Teaching; (Researcher, El Colegio de México and Instituto de Investigación et Integración Social del Estado de Oaxaca).

GEORGE V. TSERETELLI, Director, Institute of Oriental Studies, Georgian Academy of Sciences; Member, Academy of Sciences of the USSR. (Professor of Arabic and Semitic Languages, Tbilisi University).

ARCHIBALD N. TUCKER, Co-Author in the Handbook of African Languages series; (Professor of East African Languages, School of Oriental and African Studies).

E. M. UHLENBECK, Co-Editor, Lingua; Vice-President, National Council for Science Policy of The Netherlands; (Professor of Javanese Language and Literature, Professor of General Linguistics, University of Leiden).

FOOTNOTE (petit)

WERNER WINTER, Secretary, Societas Linguistica Europaea; (Professor of Linguistics, University of Kiel).

STEPHEN A. WURM, President, Linguistic Society of Australia; Chairman, Linguistic Program, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra; Editor, Pacific Linguistics; (Professor of Linguistics, Australian National University).

A report on the symposium appeared in the Linguistic Reporter, Vol. 13, No. 1, Winter 1971.

The participants constituted an Interim Committee which functioned as a supervisory body during the preparatory phase for planning the program.

The aim of the program, officially called "The International Program to Describe the Languages of the World" is to obtain a comprehensive, data-oriented descriptive account of all natural languages, both living and dead. We are, of course, aware of the fact that this ideal target will not be fully realized; the goal could be formulated more realistically by stating that the aim is the production of reliable, detailed and comparable descriptions of the synchronic state of as many languages

as possible. In this way, over a period of years - possibly decades - a series of language descriptions will be produced which achieve an acceptable level of descriptive adequacy without interfering with the freedom of the linguist to use any theoretical approach he wishes. Ideally the program should result in a "library" of 3,000 to 5,000 volumes which will give access for the first time to detailed information on all the languages of the world. This undertaking would make a substantial impact on linguistics by contributing to linguistic theory, to language typology and to the establishment of language groupings through comparison. It will also be of value to other disciplines concerned with language such as education, language planning and public administration. Hopefully, the program will also stimulate the interest of linguists in describing languages fully in all their complexity, not just in accounting for details. (One of the shortcomings of structuralism has been in shedding more and more light on smaller and smaller areas.)

The idea of describing the languages of the world is by no means original; suffice to point to the work of Hervas or Pallas or the coming 3rd edition of Les Langues du Monde which, under the editorship of Jean Perrot, will appear soon. We can also mention large-scale, systematic descriptions of geographical areas or countries, such as the five-volume description of the languages of the Soviet Union, the Australian government project to describe the aboriginal languages and a similar project to describe the languages of India. There exists also a large number

of archives which have been set up to serve as depositaries for language data. Special mention should be made of the extensive linguistic activities of the Summer Institute of Linguistics which, in connection with its missionary work, deals with the largest number and most varied group of languages - well over 400.

The program I propose here introduces an element of coordination among these endeavors by providing means, first of all, for a systematic exchange of information among interested institutions concerning the extent of their activities and the content of their archives, secondly, a means of determining needs in language description and of rationally setting priorities according to the importance and urgency of such needs and, finally, a means of coordinating efforts and better distributing resources to meet these needs. Such a coordinated effort would put available manpower to optimal use and would encourage the filling in of gaps and the coverage of languages which are on the verge of extinction. It would also call attention to existing unpublished data and fragmentary descriptions.

Thus, I envisage the optimal result of the program as a monograph covering the phonology, grammar and lexicon of each language accompanied by samples of text

and recordings and basic sociolinguistic information. In addition to information on all spoken, natural languages, the scope of the program should include pidgin and creole languages, as well as script and other media of communication such as American Indian or Australian sign languages. The status of Esperanto is of no great significance in this context. It should not, however, deal with parasitic language structures such as formalized computer languages. Also, at the outset, the descriptions should be restricted to coverage of synchronic stages of languages; that is to say, they should aim at a presentation of cohesive structures rather than giving primary consideration to dialectal variations or historic depth. Of course if a language has a long history, various stages of it could be described, e.g. Egyptian and Coptic. From a practical point of view it is also clear that a monograph is an optimal requirement and for many languages one may have to be satisfied with a basic word list or other minimum information.

It is evident that the program will not be directed to the well-described major languages of the world, but will concentrate on little known or undescribed languages. It was brought into focus very clearly at the Wartenstein symposium that the problems of the Southern Hemisphere, with its many 'white' spots, the lacunae in our knowledge

of languages, are essentially different than those of the Northern Hemisphere (as a matter of fact there would be no need for such a program for the northern part of the globe). The collection of data on dying languages is of particular urgency and complements current international endeavors to preserve records of vanishing cultures.

In order to secure maximal coverage and to avoid fragmentary presentations of languages, one of the basic tasks of the program is to establish guidelines both for the description proper and for the sociolinguistic background information of a language. Although no uniformity in theoretical approach can be imposed, comparability of the data and the necessity of providing answers to certain basic questions will have to be a minimum requirement. Therefore, the establishment of a check list of constitutive features of language would be one of the major tasks of the program.

In many ways, this is the first time in history that such a program can be tackled. There are now a large number of organizations dealing with languages; linguistic problems are of basic concern in establishing political units within states, witness India or the Soviet Union; language standardization is becoming an important problem

in developing countries; and literacy is spreading to, until now, non-literate languages. Parallel to these practical developments, linguistics enjoys an eminent position and exercises considerable influence intellectually in contemporary scholarship. There seems to be a growing number of linguists so that the manpower problem for such a huge task can be solved. A further means of increasing available manpower is the establishment of local control over language description in areas which formerly were dependent on colonial forces outside their territories. In this way native speakers might be trained to serve as collaborators in the description of their own languages, rather than as mere informants.

It is obvious that such a task as describing the world's languages presupposes international cooperative planning in which no single organization can claim a dominant role, the substantive work will have to be done by many different institutions and projects on a regional scale. But in order to serve as an administrative and coordinating body for the program an office has been set up.

I will proceed now to report concretely on the activities, past and planned, of the program office. During the past two years the program office has been supported as part of the Center for Applied Linguistics and will be maintained for two more years in Vienna, Austria, a neutral European country chosen to facilitate world-wide participation because of its long tradition in international programs and also in accordance with the general opinion of the Wartenstein symposium participants that the program should not be dominated by any one political block.

This office intends to serve as a small clearinghouse ultimately independent from any single national or organizational affiliation but cooperating with, and, ideally, receiving support from many. Our office is presently modest in scope and will continue to be so since the program is not envisaged as developing into a large-scale venture with extensive files, archives or elaborate projects. Rather, our aim is to have the program office act as a coordinating catalyst to further exchange among already existing programs by providing continually updated information on work in progress and on available resources in language description and by giving assistance to participating institutions in

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obtaining fiscal help for: 1) regional meetings and surveys, 2) substantive descriptive work and 3) publication. In other words, the function of this office is to complement the work of many institutions by serving as a focal point for on-going or planned descriptive work and by acting as a clearinghouse through which participating organizations can coordinate their efforts and receive information on a regular basis.

In addition, the office proposes to undertake certain internal activities to further the effectiveness of its clearinghouse function. These include the following: 1) organization of a pilot project, 2) investigation of format requirements by developing and analyzing alternate descriptions of the same language, 3) development of special files to serve as the basis for a communications network and for determining needs in language description, 4) the commissioning of state-of-the-art papers, 5) investigation of the possibility of producing complete corpora of languages as background documentation to the program, 6) participation in the organization of regional meetings and, at a later date 7) dissemination of a newsletter and publication of other relevant items.

1) To initiate the central aspect of the program, a pilot project in description is planned for certain selected geographical areas, or, possibly, language families. The purpose of starting on a limited test scale is to work out methods and tactics to handle the various linguistic, administrative, political and practical problems involved in such a complex endeavor as describing the languages of the world. The first step in the pilot project will be to obtain an accurate statement as to the current status in language research on each language of the area, and also a statement of linguistic resources covering the area in terms of institutions and individuals currently active in the field. Next, the problem of how to evaluate this information will be explored. That is to say, we will try to find the best way of determining the degree of adequacy of existing descriptions and of specifying the inadequately described languages. Also a means of realistically appraising available manpower and resources will be worked out in order to decide whose active support and cooperation will be needed. The final step of the pilot project will then be to propose and implement concrete plans for field work, publication, or other means to accelerate work on inadequately described languages of the chosen area. This final phase presupposes collaboration with current large-scale projects and surveys in various parts of the world.

Since subsequent activities in other areas of the world will be correlated with the results of the pilot project, specific proposals for its implementation will be submitted to the linguistic community for discussion and suggestions. In this way we hope to work out an effective and practical method for accelerating descriptive work on inadequately described languages of the area in a systematic fashion by means of whatever resources are available.

2) The specific contribution of our program office to the problem of alternate language description formats includes working on a prototype description of a language which establishes, in concrete and clearly examinable form, various ways of accounting for the same data according to different linguistic approaches (traditional, structural, tagmemic, stratificational, transformational, etc.). A multiple descriptive account of a language in its detailed complexity is necessary in order to demonstrate the correspondence of data across various methodological approaches since a uniform framework can neither be expected or required for such a program. Alternate descriptions of sample languages will be collected and special meetings held where description format problems will be discussed in an attempt to establish generally agreed upon

minimal requirements for the various components of a grammatical description. It is hoped that this work will increase the scientific value and general useability of the descriptions produced within the program's frame.

This linguistic analysis should be accompanied by format requirements for the sociolinguistic background of the languages as well.

.. 3) To carry out in a practical fashion its clearing-house function, one of the major tasks of our program is the development of a "World's Resources in Language Description" file. This file is envisaged as a monitoring file, selective in nature, with the function of keeping tabs on the descriptive material available for a particular language and on which organizations and individuals are currently engaged in research. In this way, a continually up-dated assessment of the description status of individual languages, aiming at presenting a complete picture, and a listing of potential linguistic manpower and resources for further work will be made available. This file will first be developed extensively for the language areas or families chosen for the pilot project but is set up to cover all languages.

The organization of the program's files is twofold:

a) The World's Resources in Language Description file covering each major language area has been set up consisting of: a card for language organizations indicating the organization's area of interest, its current activities, publications and personnel; a card for individual scholars working within the area giving their affiliation, language speciality and current activities; and a card for each language and dialect within the language area giving basic information such as genetic affiliation, geographical area and a rating as to the quality of existing materials. Duplicates of the organization card and the language and dialect card are filed separately in a master organization and master language file.

At the present time our files contain approximately 1000 cards covering (with the exception of the language and dialect cards) Oceania, South Asia, Lating America and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa and approximately 600 language maps.

Apart from the World's Resources in Language Description file, we have in our office duplicate copies of the Center for Applied Linguistics' language files which give detailed information on approximately 500 languages. This information will be incorporated into our card file.

b) The Meta-Survey file, which is a 'Survey of Surveys', contains a list of the major general and regional surveys completed for each language area or family.

4) In order to investigate the amount of information needed as backup data in the description of an individual language, it seemed advisable to prepare more complete documents as a sample specimen for evaluation and possible restatement of the language description proper. Kamassian, a Sayan-Samoyed language in Central Asia, has been chosen for this purpose where the existing corpus is neither trivially small nor exceedingly large and for which all known data have been collected. Kamassian is also appropriate as a model because its position within the Uralic language family is well investigated, it has records going back over three centuries and the corpus is closed because of the recent death of the last speakers. This corpus will serve as the basis for experimenting with modern technological methods of efficiently reproducing the entire corpus of a language within the program's framework.

5) The state-of-the-art papers commissioned for the program include topics concerning: previous attempts at describing the world's languages, surveys of various organizations which deal with language description on a large scale, concrete problems of language description, and sociolinguistic background information.

6) Our plans include the organization of regional meetings for areas where the language situation is currently unknown, mainly in the Southern Hemisphere, Asia, Oceania, Australia, Africa and Latin America.

7) We also envisage, at a later stage, the establishment of a newsletter for the program and publication of other relevant items. Currently we have prepared for publication the papers presented at the Burg Wartenstein symposium and the papers from a preceding conference in Washington on format questions are being edited. State-of-the-art papers commissioned in the framework of the program will also be published.

As I mentioned before, the program has been supported by the Center for Applied Linguistics since the Burg Wartenstein Symposium in 1970 and can expect two more years of support from the Center. Further questions as to the internationalization of the program office and its staff, its supervision by a representative body of linguists, the search for additional funds and the determination of relationships to other international organizations, such as UNESCO, are yet to be worked out.

The program outlined above is a major, long-range task of linguistics. Many of our colleagues will obviously be uninterested in such a program because of other interests and commitments. But for those who are interested either actively in describing languages or in providing administrative support and advice, I extend an invitation to cooperate in furthering the program to describe the languages of the world.

To secure follow-up of this presentation, a brief report with a request for suggestions will be sent to all participants of this Congress and to other linguists and interested scholars.

DISCUSSANTS

after the International Program to Describe the Languages of the World presented by John Lotz at the Plenary Session, August 29, 1972.

Kenneth L. Pike (USA)

Viktoria Jarceva (Soviet Union)

György Szépe (Hungary)

Wolfgang Dressler (Austria)

Stephen Wurm (Australia)

Joseph Greenberg (USA)

FINAL REPORT
TO MEMBERS OF THE INTERIM COMMITTEE
FOR THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM TO DESCRIBE THE LANGUAGES
OF THE WORLD

The following is submitted as a summary report on activities of the International Program to Describe the Languages of the World, initiated at the Center for Applied Linguistics, to the Interim Committee established at the Burg Wartenstein Symposium for the two-year period beginning August, 1970.

I. ADMINISTRATION. The activities of the Program were conducted during the first year at the central office of the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington D.C. During this time, as suggested at the Symposium, plans were made to establish a Program office in a neutral country in Europe to facilitate wide-range international cooperation. In the Summer of 1971 a temporary office was set up in Budapest where the Program staff simultaneously participated in a large-scale, Ford Foundation supported Hungarian-English Contrastive Study Project. The office, which has three full-time staff members, will be moved to Vienna, Austria in the near future in accordance with the original policy.

The Program office is planned to be modest in scope, serving as a small clearinghouse through which participating organizations and individuals can coordinate their efforts and receive relevant information, documents and progress reports.

Up to the present time the Program has been supported by the Center for Applied Linguistics and commitments have been made by the Center for an additional two years of support. Following the Burg Wartenstein Symposium, funds to help develop the planning phase of the Program were obtained from other sources, such as the U.S. Office of Education, the Wenner-Gren Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies.

The Program is conceived, not as a funding agency, but rather as a coordinating catalyst to further exchange among existing programs, to give assistance in obtaining fiscal help for meetings, substantive work and publications.

II. REPORTING AND PUBLICATION. A 100-page transcript of the proceedings of the Burg Wartenstein Symposium was submitted to the Wenner-Gren Foundation in October 1970 along with a brief summary report of the conference which appeared in Current Anthropology. A more lengthy report appeared in the Linguistic Reporter (Vol. 13, No. 1, Winter 1971).

The papers submitted to the Burg Wartenstein Symposium have been pre-edited and will be published subsequent to the Bologna Congress. Papers from an earlier conference held in April 1970 in Washington, D.C. will appear in a separate volume in 1973.

In addition, State-of-the-Art papers on various aspects of the Program, the scope of background information necessary, surveys of ongoing related linguistic activities, as well as content problems of language description have been commissioned and will be published.

III. MEETINGS. In June 1971 Haskins Laboratories of New Haven, Connecticut and the Center for Applied Linguistics cooperated in arranging a discussion on Phonological Data Formats for Language Description. The aim of the meeting was to solicit suggestions as to what minimal phonological requirements are necessary for an adequate description of a language. A memorandum was prepared at the conclusion of the conference summarizing the recommendations of the participants.

Other planned meetings were postponed due to the relocation of the Program office.

IV. PLANS.

1. Recommendations. At present we have received the following suggestions from various linguists, representative of nearly every area of the world, as to what kind of publications they would like to have as a result of the Program and what additional activities might be carried out in connection with it:

A) A series of comparable data-oriented language descriptions consisting of a phonology, grammar, and lexicon accompanied by basic sociolinguistic information, texts and tapes.

B) A related program of actual field work in unknown languages.

C) Coordination of archives with the goal of developing an information retrieval system, not towards document retrieval (as there are already adequate regionally-oriented systems on this aspect) but rather the retrieval of information on the features of a language.

D) A program for the linguistic training of native speakers of a language to serve as collaborators, rather than informants.

E) A geographical linguistic atlas independent of genetic relations, with an ecological emphasis to bring together in one comprehensive volume the distribution of the languages of the world, their neighbors, their status in the area and their interaction.

F) A translation program or preparation of digests of existing surveys for wider dissemination.

G) A series of activities to establish a generalized framework for language descriptions within which linguists can contribute according to their various theoretical persuasions without sacrificing or obscuring a certain required amount of basic data. Special symposia and continued discussions have been proposed to find a neutral level of requirements where conflicts of vested interest in a particular nomenclature are avoided and a method is devised for best presenting information without adhering to a pre-established set of rules.

2. Pilot Project. Rather than immediately launch a world-wide systematic program (which obviously must be unclear and unwieldy at the outset) for furthering the description of the languages of the world, it is proposed that a pilot project be implemented in selected geographical areas and for language families where methods and strategies for implementing the Program will be explored and worked out on a limited scale with the goal of eventually extending the coverage to all languages of the world, primarily to inadequately described languages. In this way, over a period of years, a series of comparable data-oriented grammatical and lexical studies of individual languages will be produced which can then be meshed into larger studies of broad areas and entire language families, and which then can also be readily

used for studies in general language problems.

The pilot project will consist of the following three steps where methods and tactics will be devised to handle the various linguistic, administrative, political and practical problems involved in such an endeavor: a) Obtaining i) an accurate assessment as to the current status in language research on each language of the area, and ii) a statement of linguistic resources covering the area in terms of institutions and individuals currently active in the field; b) Evaluating the information so obtained, i.e. a specification of the inadequately described languages and a realistic appraisal of available manpower whose active support and cooperation should be sought; c) Proposing concrete plans for field work, publication, or other means to accelerate work on inadequately described languages of the area.

Since subsequent activities in other areas of the world will be based on the results of the pilot project, specific proposals for implementation of the work on the inadequately described languages recommended and given priority above will be subject to detailed discussion by the linguistic community as to the nature and extent of publications and administrative procedures. The central factor in making these proposals, however, should always be consideration of the main objective of the Program, namely that of accelerating descriptive work on inadequately described languages in a systematic fashion by means of whatever resources are available.

3. Alternate Language Description Formats. A series of activities directed to the problem of language description formats are planned. We are currently

working on a prototype description of Hungarian which establishes, in concrete and clearly examinable form, alternative ways of accounting for the same language data according to various linguistic approaches (traditional, structural, tagmemic, stratificational, transformational, etc.). Alternate descriptions of other sample languages will be collected and special meetings held where description format problems will be discussed in an attempt to establish generally agreed upon minimum requirements for the various components of a grammatical description. A limited test project will be executed on the basis of the description requirements so obtained and the resulting descriptions will then be sent to linguists with diverse specializations for evaluation as to their usefulness and for suggestions as to improvements.

4. Background Documentation. In order to investigate the amount of information needed as backup data in the description of an individual language, it seemed advisable to prepare more complete documents as a sample specimen for evaluation and possible restatement of the language description proper. Kamassian, a Sayan-Samoyed language, has been chosen for this purpose, where the existing corpus is neither trivially small nor exceedingly large and for which all known data have been collected. Kamassian is also appropriate as a model because its position within the Uralic language family is well investigated and it has records going back over three centuries. This corpus will serve as the basis for experimenting with modern technological methods of efficiently reproducing the entire corpus of a language.

5. Files. The Program has undertaken the development of a filing system currently envisaged as a central 'pointer' or monitoring file with the function of keeping tabs on the description status of a particular language and on organizations and individuals currently engaged in research. The file is not being developed as a comprehensive bibliographical retrieval system since there are already a variety of language archives and language area file systems in existence for this purpose. Rather than list every item of available material, information is selected with the aim of creating a comprehensive and continually up-dated assessment on what has been done on individual languages.

The organization of the Program's files is as follows:

a) World's Resources in Language Description File. A file to cover each major language area has been set up consisting of a card for language organizations which contains relevant information such as area of interest, current activities, publications, personnel, etc., a card for individual scholars working within the area giving their affiliation, language speciality, current activities etc. and a card for each language and dialect within the language area giving basic information such as genetic affiliation, geographical area etc. Duplicates of the organization card and the language and dialect card are filed separately in a master organization and master language file.

At the present time our files contain approximately 1000 cards covering (with the exception of the language and dialect cards) Oceania, South Asia, Latin

America and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa and approximately 600 language maps.

Apart from the World's Resources in Language Description file, we have in our office copies of the Center for Applied Linguistics' language files which give detailed information on approximately 500 languages. This information will be incorporated into our card file.

b) Meta-Survey File. This 'Survey of Surveys' file contains a list of the major general and regional surveys completed for each language area or family.

6. Area Meetings. Regional meetings are proposed for areas which contain 'white' spots in language coverage, mainly in the Southern Hemisphere, Asia, Oceania, Australia, Africa and Latin America.

Respectfully submitted,

July 31, 1972

John Lotz

John Lotz
Executive Secretary, Interim Committee
International Program to Describe the
Languages of the World

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INTERIM COMMITTEE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM TO DESCRIBE THE LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD

BOLOGNA, ITALY

AUGUST 31, 1972

A meeting of the Interim Committee of the International Program to Describe the Languages of the World was held at a luncheon on August 31, 1972 at 1:45 P.M. during the XIth International Congress of Linguists in Bologna, Italy.

The following Committee members were present: Gilbert Ansre, Chairman, Charles Ferguson, Shirô Hattori, Einar Haugen, Victoria Jarceva, John Lotz, Executive Secretary, Jean Perrot, Kenneth Pike, Werner Winter and Stephen Wurm.

E.M. Uhlenbeck was present at the Congress but was unable to attend the meeting because of sudden illness.

James Bynon of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London represented Archibald Tucker who was unable to attend the Congress.

In addition to Committee members, the following guests were present: Luigi Heilmann, General Secretary of the Congress; Joseph Greenberg, Stanford University, USA; Ayo Bamgbose, University of Ibadan, Nigeria; William G. Moulton, President of the Board of Trustees of the Center for Applied Linguistics; John H. Hammer, Secretary of the Center for Applied Linguistics; Mrs. John Hammer and Mrs. Einar Haugen.

Rudolph Troike, Director of the Center for Applied Linguistics did not attend but appointed Sirarpi Ohannessian to represent him.

Giacomo Devoto, President of the Congress was called away on business at the outset of the meeting.

Julie Burgoyne, rapporteuse of the Burg Wartenstein Symposium, was asked by the Chairman to serve as recording secretary for the meeting.

Brief welcoming remarks were given by John Lotz, Executive Secretary of the Committee.

Gilbert Ansre, Chairman of the Committee, officially called the meeting to order at the conclusion of Dr. Lotz' remarks. He expressed his apologies for missing the formal presentation of the program at the plenary session held two days earlier (August 29, 1972) due to his illness which delayed his arrival at the Congress but said that he had read both the Final Report on the activities of the program during the past two years which was submitted to the Interim Committee by the Executive Secretary and the paper presented at the plenary session. Dr. Ansre expressed his approval of the Final Report on behalf of the Committee.

He continued by expressing his regret that he and other Committee members had not engaged in more activity during these two years but thanked the Secretariat for the work that had been accomplished and referred to a more detailed paper, prepared by Mrs. Julie Burgoyne, in which basic principles and suggested procedures for the pilot projects are discussed. He suggested that this document be made available to the Committee.

Dr. Ansre then discussed the contents of the paper referred to above, especially as regards pilot projects in selected geographical areas. He endorsed the idea of selecting areas where a good deal of work needs to be done but also suggested emphasis on areas where the chances of success are reasonably promising. He then invited the Committee members to make recommendations to the Secretariat as to which areas should be chosen. His own suggestions as to possible areas for the pilot project included: West Africa where a number of conditions seem favorable, e.g. the need for comprehensive descriptions of languages, accessibility of facilities and institutions, availability of reasonably highly qualified indigenous linguistic expertise and the possibility of collaborating with the on-going Data Sheets Project and also of fiscal cooperation (e.g. with the West African Linguistic Association); Bolivia, where the size of the area seems manageable and some work, by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, is already in progress; and Eastern Africa where the project

could be a more detailed follow-up of the Surveys on Language Use Project supported by the Ford Foundation.

Finally, Dr. Ansre suggested that the following matters might be considered for discussion: What should be done with the matter of continuing the Interim Committee which was set up only until this Congress? What will be the future role of the Center for Applied Linguistics in the program? What is to be done about the raising of funds? How will the internationalization of the program office be carried out?

Dr. Ansre concluded his remarks by thanking the members for their collaboration thus far and the Center for Applied Linguistics for its support in terms of personnel and finance. He welcomed the presence of the guests in attendance and invited them to assist in further efforts in making the program a success.

Dr. Ansre then declared the meeting open for discussion.

During the general discussion, various administrative aspects of the program were touched upon, including its possible cooperation with international institutions, such as UNESCO, and on-going projects in Nepal, New Guinea, India, Southeast Asia and the Stanford Phonological Universals Project. It was mentioned that the program should consist of sub-projects on a regional basis but that realistic funding proposals would have to accompany any suggested area. It was emphasized several times that the question of establishing format guidelines, including sociolinguistic background information, was especially important and that activities should be planned to handle this aspect of the program. No formal action was taken on these matters.

The remainder of the discussion centered on decisions as to the continuation, function and composition of the Interim Committee. Although both Einar Haugen and Charles Ferguson offered their resignation, it was agreed that the Committee continue in its present form for the time being, leaving rearrangement, additions and the possible establishment of special regional committees for a later date.

The following motions were formally passed as a result of this discussion. Dr. Kenneth Pike moved: 1) that the Committee continue as presently constituted with the addition of William Moulton, the new President of the CIPL; and 2) that the Committee function in an advisory capacity, not as a working body, lending prestige to the program by virtue of its existence and endorsement while the actual work and funding proposals would be carried out by the Secretariat. Dr. Pike further moved that a short presentation of the program be sent to the CIPL for its official support. Dr. Pike's motions were carried unanimously.

Dr. Ansre's motion to distribute the document presenting more detailed suggestions for the pilot projects was passed with the request that comments on it and further suggestions be returned to the Secretariat on or before October 31, 1972.

At this point the meeting was adjourned.

John Lotz
Executive Secretary

This paper, prepared by Julie Burgoyne in the Spring of 1972, served as a background document for the presentation of the International Program to Describe the Languages of the World. It is intended as a working paper for developing future plans and administrative procedures for the program and for formulating its basic aims. Comments and further suggestions for all sections are invited.

PILOT PROJECT IN A SELECTED LANGUAGE FAMILY OR AREA
for the
INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM TO DESCRIBE THE LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD

INTRODUCTION

Rather than immediately launch a world-wide program (which obviously must be unclear and unwieldy at the outset) for furthering the description of the languages of the world, it is proposed that pilot projects be implemented in selected geographical areas and language families where methods and strategies for implementing the program will be explored and worked out on a limited scale with the goal of eventually extending the coverage to all languages of the world, primarily to inadequately described languages. In this way, over a period of years, a series of comparable data-oriented grammatical and lexical studies of individual languages will be produced which can then be meshed into larger studies of broad areas and entire language families, and which can also readily be consulted for studies in general language problems.

The pilot project will consist of three steps where methods and tactics will be devised to handle the various linguistic, administrative, political and practical problems involved in such an endeavor. These three stages consist of:

Stage 1: Obtaining; a) an accurate assessment as to the current status in language research on each language of the area, and b) a statement of linguistic resources covering the area in terms of institutions and individuals currently active in the field.

Stage 2: Evaluating this information obtained, e.g. a specification of the inadequately described languages and a realistic appraisal of available manpower, either governmental, academic or individual, whose active support and cooperation should be sought.

Stage 3: Proposing concrete plans for field work, publication, or other means to accelerate work on inadequately described languages of the area.

STAGE 1. ASSESSMENT OF LANGUAGE FAMILY OR LANGUAGE AREA NEEDS

A detailed assessment of already existing materials, lacunae and personnel for a particular family or area would include:

A) A comprehensive list of relevant organizations and individuals active in the field.

B) A listing of descriptive survey work done to date on languages of the area.

C) A survey of the contents and usefulness of existing language archives, unpublished collections of materials and of personal files.

Suggested methods for obtaining this information:

i) The World's Resources in Language Description file of the program for information on linguistic resources and personnel under point 1A above.

ii) Correspondance to individuals and organizations requesting:

a) A report on their work in progress or recently completed.

b) A specification of undescribed or inadequately described languages in their area.

c) A list of individual workers qualified to contribute descriptions and an indication of their willingness to participate.

d) An indication of possible practical difficulties and suggestions for making the description task feasible.

iii) Commissioning State-of-the-Art papers for the area (see Appendix I).

iv) On-site visits to archives and individuals possessing unpublished materials to:

a) Discuss problems

b) Solicit suggestions

c) Assess extent of coverage, quality and usefulness of their files.

v) A conference of specialists where each participant addresses himself to the problem of supplying the necessary information for a sub-division of the area.

Illustration of the Type of Data to be Provided for Point A under Stage 1 by the Program's File on Linguistic Resources.

If, for example, South American Indian languages were chosen for study under the pilot project, the following materials on hand in the World's Languages Program office would be developed in conjunction with a combination of the methods above in order to collect the information necessary for evaluating the needs of the area.

In order to obtain a complete listing of linguistic resources and manpower available, as well as information on the current status of work for the Indian languages of the South American area, the following organizations would first be consulted. For each of these organizations we already have in our World's Resources in Language Description file a card containing information on its current activities, personnel, publications, etc.:

Asociación de Lingüística y Filología di América Latina. (ALFAL). Mexico City, Mexico.

Asociación Chilano de Profesores e Investigadores de Lengua y Literatura. Santiago, Chile.

Asociación Latinoamericana para la investigacion Lingüística mediante Equipos Mecanico-Electrónicos. Mexico City, Mexico.

Centro de Estudios Lingüísticos y Literarios. Mexico City, Mexico.

Centro de Lingüística Aplicada. Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Comisión Indigenista. Venezuela.

Departamento de Lingüística y Literaturas Clásicas. Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Human Relations Area Files. New Haven, Connecticut, USA.

Instituto Caro y Cuervo. Bogotá, Colombia.

Institute de Filología y Letras Hispánicas. Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Instituto de Filología 'Andrés Bello'. Caracas, Venezuela.

Instituto Indigenista Interamericano.

Instituto de Lingüística, University of Cuyo. Mendoza, Argentina.

Instituto Lingüístico de Verano, SIL. Mexico City, Mexico.

Instituto Nacional de Anthropología e Historia. Mexico City, Mexico.

The Inter-American Program in Linguistics and Language Teaching. Mexico City, Mexico.

Linguistic Bureau of Surinam. Surinam.

Museu Nacional. Brazil.

Smithsonian Institution. Washington, D.C., USA.

Center for General and Applied Linguistics, University of Coimbra. Coimbra, Portugal.

Institute de Filologia, University of Chile. Santiago, Chile.

Departamento de Lingüística, Universidad de la República. Montevideo, Uruguay.

Departamento de Filología, University of San Marcos. Lima, Peru.

Voegelin and Voegelin. Archives of the Languages of the World. Bloomington, Indiana, USA.

In addition to these listed organizations located mainly in Latin America, there are separate cards for numerous university departments and research institutes throughout Latin America, the United States, Canada and Europe which specialize in South American languages and linguistics; these institutions would also be consulted in an overall assessment of the linguistic resources of South America. In addition, the program maintains a file on individual scholars from all over the world, including those affiliated with institutions not necessarily specializing in the study of South American Indian languages.

STAGE 2. EVALUATION AND PRIORITY DECISIONS.

After the program staff has collected information by one or a combination of the methods suggested, a final general evaluation of the language area and of individual languages requiring special attention should be attempted including:

A) Evaluation of the descriptive adequacy of material for each language according to some generally agreed upon scale established specifically for the program.

B) Recommendation of priorities, i.e. which languages should be covered first for which reasons (e.g. for diachronic purposes it might be better to conduct in-depth studies of families of closely related languages; dying languages and some language isolates might receive special treatment; or practical considerations, fiscal constraints or the orientation of a collaborating institution might affect priority decisions).

C) A choice of key personnel and organizations whose active support should be enlisted.

Suggested means of implementation of this stage:

i) Turn over information collected during Stage 1 to:

a) A selected panel of linguists; or

b) An interested organization or research center for final recommendations.

ii) Hold a conference where specialists of the area are invited to make the evaluation on the basis of the collected information.

iii) Request an interested organization or research center to give a comprehensive report and evaluation on the area.

Need for more Rational Priorities in Language Description.

It is hoped that the program will contribute to efforts to establish a more rational, or at least more reasoned basis, for conducting research. Decisions as to which languages should have priority for coverage will differ according to an individual linguist's or an organization's orientation; e.g. the desire to settle questioned genetic relationships, to establish dialect-language boundaries, to investigate a language because of its special interest or its interesting position in a multilingual area or simply because it is a dying language. But a major difficulty stems from the fact that often work is not based on one of these well-defined reasons, but verges on total randomness. Although one cannot (nor would one want to) set up an overall master plan which establishes priorities and orders people to carry on work within its frame, it is nevertheless desirable and feasible to provide direction through systematic surveys of surveys, encouraging the filling in of gaps and establishing some generally agreed upon basis of priorities as to why more effort should be made in describing certain languages before others. Some organizations already are working to serve this function for their particular areas by giving advice as to what is being done and which languages need coverage. Thus, as stated before, the objective is not to develop something new, but is rather a more modest effort to help coordinate, on an international level, the work of already existing and active institutions.

STAGE 3. IMPLEMENTATION

Since subsequent activities in other areas of the world will be largely based on the results of the pilot project, specific proposals for implementation of the work on the inadequately described languages recommended and given priority under STAGE 2 will be subject to detailed discussion by interested specialists as to the nature and extent of publications and as to administrative procedures. These concrete proposals should, however, always take into consideration the main objective of the total program namely that of accelerating descriptive work on inadequately described languages in a systematic and realistic fashion by means of whatever resources are available.

At present we have received the following suggestions from various linguists, representative of nearly every area of the world, as to what kind of publications they would like to have as a result of the program and what additional activities might be carried out in connection with it:

A) A series of comparable data-oriented language descriptions consisting of a phonology, grammar, and lexicon accompanied by basic demographic information, texts and tapes.

B) A related program of actual field work in unknown languages.

C) Coordination of archives with the goal of developing, not an information retrieval system (as there are already adequate regionally-oriented systems of this aspect), but rather the retrieval of information on the features and phenomena of a language.

D) A program for the linguistic training of native speakers of a language to serve as collaborators, rather than informants.

E) A geographical linguistic atlas independent of genetic relations, with an ecological emphasis to bring together in one comprehensive volume the distribution in space of the languages of the world, their neighbors, their status in the area and their interaction.

F) A translation program or preparation of digests of existing surveys for wider dissemination.

G) A series of activities to establish a generalized framework for language descriptions within which linguists can contribute according to their various theoretical persuasions without sacrificing or obscuring a certain required amount of basic data. Special symposia and continued discussions have been proposed to find a neutral level or requirements where conflicts of vested interest in a particular nomenclature are avoided and a method is devised for best presenting information without adhering to a pre-established set of rules. (See Appendix II.)

Practical Suggestions for Publication and an Administrative Structure to carry out the Project:

i) Central Coordinating Office: Establishment of a central office for the program, planned to be located in Vienna, through which research centers, individuals and organizations from all over the world can coordinate their efforts, organize conferences and receive all relevant information (e.g. maps, new descriptions), documents and progress reports on a regular basis as members of the program's communication network.

ii) World's Resources in Language Description File: A central file with the function of acting as a monitoring system on other language files and archives and organizations and personnel currently active in language description. This file would not be considered as a comprehensive information retrieval system as there are already a variety of language archives and language area file systems in existence. That is to say, the approach would not be to list every single item of available material on a language but rather to generally indicate the amount of work done on individual languages, where, by whom, and then focus on areas of greatest needs, i.e. languages with no information or possibly languages of particular linguistic or anthropological significance. At this

point it may then become necessary to expand the files to include more extensive information both as to documents and personnel on certain selected languages.

iii) Publications:

a) Utilization of regular commercial publishers for both description and data.

b) An experimental program of publication which investigates: reproduction of complete corpora of materials on individual languages (e.g. via microfiche) or other means of fast, simple and inexpensive publication of raw data.

c) Engagement of several expert linguistic advisors and editors on a full-time basis to direct the preparation of existing raw linguistic materials for publication as descriptions.

iv) Funding: Since the World's Languages Program as presently conceived is not a funding agency, many different sources should be encouraged to contribute fiscal support, manpower and administrative facilities both for actual publication and exploratory research projects.

APPENDIX I

State-of-the-Art papers in connection with the World's Languages Program have been commissioned as follows:

Professor Robert Austerlitz, Columbia University on "Previous Attempts to Describe the Languages of the World"

Dr. György Szépe, Linguistic Institute, MTA, Hungary on "European Activities relevant to the Description of the World's Languages with Special Focus on Eastern Europe"

Professor Wolfgang Dressler, University of Vienna on "Linguistic Problems concerning the Analysis of Texts longer than the Sentence"

Professor Joe Grimes, Cornell University on "Summer Institute of Linguistics' Activities in Linguistics"

Professor Arpád Szabó, Budapest on "The Greek Model of Describing Languages (As the Basis of Subsequent European Linguistic Scholarship)"

Additional papers have been requested on the following topics: "Requirements for Language Description with Reference to Universals"; "Phonetic Requirements for Language Description"; "Sociological Requirements for Language Description"; "Problems of Script in Describing the World's Languages"; and "Problems in Describing Dead Languages".

APPENDIX II

TOWARD A GENERALIZED OBSERVATIONAL FORMAT FOR LANGUAGE DESCRIPTION.

One of the greatest impediments to efforts in understanding the nature of natural language is that linguistics and other language related studies are rarely based upon comparable, reliable sets of data across languages. For many languages, of course, there already exists extensive reliable and comparable data either within a language itself or within a family where comparative genetic studies have a long tradition; but even in these instances, there is a lack of easily contrastible data for those who are interested in other than grammatical aspects of speech behaviour. There is no doubt that anyone concerned with language contact, interference, inter-dependency, acquisition or other aspects of speech behavior would profit from reliable, cross-cultural descriptions of individual languages.

Theoretical linguistics will especially benefit from a greater body of more readily comparable data against which to test theories then has heretofore been possible. Irrespective of their theoretical persuasions or special area of interest, linguists agree that much effort is wasted in describing one language after nother without regard to presenting the data in a manner which is maximally relevant and usable in aiding other researchers to find answers to

their questions about language in general or a language phenomenon in particular. Yet as an empirical science, linguistic theory can only advance insofar as it accounts for language phenomena within the context of all languages, not only upon the basis of data from prejudicially selected or haphazardly chosen languages or often on the basis of data drawn from unreliable, incomprehensive or parochial descriptions.

" For those theoreticians concerned with the problem of developing theoretical models to adequately account for the phenomena of a natural language a necessary criterion is a corpus of primary linguistic data comprehensive enough to first classify all the autonomous functional or otherwise defined units at a particular level and the context within which they occur. Only then is one able to proceed in the analysis. It is obviously better to extrapolate universal linguistic constraints or generalizations from a large body of reliable data on as many known languages as possible than it is to be forced to rely solely on fragmentary data (often fragmentary in the sense of being selected to fit a particular model rather than the model being devised to account for a comprehensive and objective presentation of the data) or to speculate on universal constraints of potential languages on the basis of data from one or two well-described languages.

For some time now linguistics has served as a model to the social sciences with its "more formalized, scientific" methodology. To continue its development as an accumulative science where new theoretical explanations can build upon the results of previous research and theory in an empirically sound and theoretically valid manner, much thought and cooperative effort is needed at this time to work toward a typology of language description or an observational framework that will aid in advancing a linguist's ability to write grammars of individual languages which are more comprehensive and easily contrastible. All too often, through their specialized terminology or sophisticated abstractions, descriptions done exclusively on the basis of a particular school of thought obscure to some extent the underlying linguistic facts upon which they are based, or simply exclude important information that does not fit their framework. Thus, the linguistic researcher uninitiated in a particular methodology (or even those who are proficient) are often at a loss as to how to retrieve the basic empirical or observational facts of a description because they have not been explicitely defined at some point either by means of an objective, neutral level terminology or by reverse rewrite rules. Whereas it is impossible to describe a language from an atheoretical

point of view (and also undesirable since compilation of "facts" without concern for their functional status within some framework are rarely useful to a linguist) it is possible -- to a greater or lesser extent -- to present certain facts which cut across theories explicitely enough that workers of other theoretical persuasions can retrieve them either for their own purposes or in order to facilitate evaluation of the description itself.

To work toward this goal of improving the general serviceability of language descriptions, two stages of extensive international cooperation involving many linguists will be required: first in the work of actually devising generally accepted minimum requirements for language descriptions and subsequently in the more difficult task of encouraging scholars to answer or provide data for a certain number of questions they may not answer of their own accord working within their respective frames.

Of course, it is obviously easier to point out the need for a generalized linguistic framework for language description than it is to devise one. It is difficult for linguists, regardless of their theoretical viewpoint to specify exactly what kinds of facts they want and in what form. There are a large variety of descriptive frameworks,

each of which includes items others do not and rarely does a researcher obtain exactly the kind of information he wants. This is, of course, to be expected to some degree because if it were clear as to how and what kinds of linguistic facts should be presented for each language, we would have already reached our objective of clearly understanding the phenomenon of natural language. Nevertheless it is possible for those concerned with language research to contribute to devising a more useful and comprehensive set of questions about languages than formats presently contain, thus insuring inclusion of important phenomena which are often left out of or difficult to retrieve from existing descriptions and grammars. Given the recent expansion of linguistic activity, the increasing numbers of young linguists and a growing concern with language related problems, the international linguistic community should now be able to work together in such a joint enterprise which focuses on one of the most pressing needs of their discipline. To this end it is hoped that the program will stimulate many diverse scholars including, dialectologists, area specialists, theoreticians, comparativists, typologists, socio-psycholinguists, speech researchers and others to help in formulating: formats, guidelines, questionnaires, multiple function test vocabularies, check lists of catetory features, typological inventory features or any other list of parameters they feel

would elicit the presentation in some explicit form of the kinds of facts they consider most relevant and necessary for a language description, but which, at the same time, would not interfere with the freedom of a researcher to follow any theoretical model he chooses.

Within the context of the pilot project a series of activities will be directed to the problem of description formats. Dr. Lotz is currently working on a project to develop prototype grammars of Hungarian which establishes in concrete and clearly examinable form variant descriptions of the same language material according to various linguistic schools. Alternate descriptions of other languages will be solicited and special meetings or symposia held where description format problems will be discussed in an attempt to determine the minimum boundaries of the various components of a grammatical description. A limited test project could be executed on the basis of the description requirements so obtained and the results of the project could then be subject to the evaluation of diverse linguists who will be asked if they are able to do what they want to do on the basis of this information, and if not, what improvements are needed. In this way, as many suggestions as possible can be evaluated before substantive work is done in other areas of the world.